

## Families setting course to fit future

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MARQUETTE — For the fourth time, The Mining Journal and Marquette General Hospital have teamed up to direct the community's focus toward health and fitness.

This six-month Healthy Weight Journal 4 Fit Family Challenge session will run through July. Readers will be able to follow the Thomas and the Christian families as they make changes to their eating and exercise habits in order to secure a more healthful future.

The Thomas family includes parents Dale and Michele, and children Rachel, 17, and Michael, 14. The Christian family members are parents Daric and Glenda, and children Devin, 12, and Aiden, 7.

This new endeavor began with fitness assessments to ensure safe participation, with a fitness re-evaluation planned for April. They also were interviewed to determine their likelihood of success.

Having met those prerequisites, the families began their Fit Family journey with trips to the Snowy Plains Kennel to try their hands at dog sledding and snowshoeing.

The second fitness outing was a Feb. 23 trip to the Noquemanon Trail Network trailhead at off Forestville Road. There the families expanded their outdoor experience by strapping on cross country skis and taking to the trail.

Previous programs included educational meetings along with gym and personal workout/exercise plans. This time around, the exercise aspect will continue to focus on family activities, rather than solely individual exercise.

The Challenge also will include home visits to help the families become aware of buying and eating patterns, as well as exposing the empty calories silently lurking on pantry shelves. The home visits will be explored further in future articles.

Coverage of this new session will include interviews with the participants where they can relate their individual views and progress.

As in previous programs, Donna Marlor, director of Weight Management at MGH will provide direction, help with any pitfalls participants encounter, and offer nutritional insight and solutions.

The session's first parents-only meeting was Wednesday, Feb. 20 at Peter White Public Library. It was an opportunity to discuss food choices, meal changes, and to evaluate the nutritional value of chosen foods.

"I don't drink soda anymore," said Daric Christian, who had gastric bypass surgery in December. He is faced with the challenge of consuming enough quality nutrition through very small portions.

"The hardest thing about the surgery is that I can't drink when I eat," he said. Christian also has to watch which starches he eats; pasta and rice expand in the stomach. He has answered that by choosing tabouli, made with bulgar wheat, which doesn't swell further.

Glenda Christian has lost more than 50 pounds since August, in preparation of the lifestyle changes that would come with Daric's surgery. She is a traveling nurse, and has solved some of her daily dietary challenges by outfitting her car with an insulated case packed with a variety of appropriate foods.

Marlor advised the group to be aware of calorie density. A daily consumption of about three pounds of food is necessary for satiety. If those three pounds are comprised of high-calorie foods, the daily calorie intake can skyrocket.

She emphasized the importance of goal setting, and making that goal something for which they have a passion. Marlor also told the group that everyone she's seen be successful at weight loss had the same attitude: I'm going to do what it takes.

One common nutritional obstacle mentioned is some parents' inclination to cater to children's food preferences to the exclusion of nutritionally valuable choices. The parents were encouraged to continue offering previously refused foods, because tastes change, and varied nutritious choices should be available.

"What I like about this is doing it together, and teaching the kids the right way," said Michele Thomas.

The group will work to expand the families' food repertoire, and thus enhance nutritional variety.

Marlor succinctly summed up the group's battle:

"The process of changing lifestyle behaviors is not a simple one, and each person's path has similarities — but they are as different as a fingerprint."

Other families in the community/area/region are encouraged to follow along, monitoring the challenges and successes of the Christian and Thomas families, and embrace their own changes for greater health and fitness.